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ABSTRACT

If the purpose for teaching children's literature is to introduce readers to books to which they can respond and to encourage self-directed reading, the necessity of considering the reader's point of view is obvious. If the teacher approaches the subject from the student's point of view, the selection of materials will be influenced, thereby giving students the opportunity to respond to materials which recognize and accept a wide range of interests and tastes. Narrow categories that label books tend to limit, rather than expand, reading possibilities. Observation indicates that adults who have been taught children's literature with required reading lists often use the same required reading list when teaching children's literature to children. This can also serve as a limitation in the selection of books to meet the interests and needs of the reader. Book report forms can serve as a limiting factor in the reader's response to a book. Care should be taken by the teacher to avoid limiting children's reading material selection or response to material read. (LL)

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TEACHING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE--"From the Point of View of the Reader"

To teach children's literature from the point of view of the reader would seem to be the only defensible way to approach the task whether you are teaching literature to children or to adults. If the purpose for teaching is to introduce readers to books to which they can respond and to encourage self-directed reading, then the responsibility for considering the reader's point of view is clearly evident.

Children's literature is taught to children and to adults; it is taught to adults so that they can be more effective when teaching children. The methods used should reflect the teachers' recognition of the interrelatedness of the two groups of students. College students studying children's literature will try to predict the responses of the child who will read or hear the story or poem, i.e., try to see it from the point of view of the reader.

There are implications for procedures in teaching children's literature if the teacher believes in working from the reader's point of view. Selection of materials will be influenced. Students will have the opportunity to respond to materials which recognize and accept a wide range of interests and tastes. Wallace Hildick in CHILDREN AND FICTION (World, 1971) and Selma Lanes in DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE (Atheneum, 1971) contend that the popularity of Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys, Enid Blyton books, and Bobbsey Twins books prove that these are a significant part of literature from the reader's point of view. Why?

Narrow categories can be challenged. The label, "easy book" would be eliminated if we were to think about the reader for whom most of the books so labeled are hard, not easy. Bibliotherapy books, girls' books, boys' books--can we defend any categories of materials which limit rather than increase enjoyment and reading of literature?

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Can we use required reading lists, teaching children or adults, and really respect the reader's point of view? Observation proves that adults who have been taught with required reading lists tend to use required reading lists when they teach children. A list from which to choose and the reader's right to respond in his own way to what he chooses to read is quite different from required reading and rightness of response determined by whether the response is in agreement with the response of the teacher. A boy read WRINKLE IN TIME in the spring when the book won the Newbery Award. The structure for hi response was determined by the book report form. It went like this--

BOOK REPORT
(Intermediate Grades) "3"

1. Title of the book (1#) A Wrinkle in Time (#1)-"Art work?"
2. Author's full name Madeline L'Engle
3. Your name _____
4. Date of report April 19, 1963
5. Have you read this book before? No
6. During what years or time does this story take place? present
7. In what land or lands did the characters live? United States
8. Who is the main character? Meg
9. Describe him briefly She is about 5 feet tall and wars glasses.
10. Name other important characters Charles Wallance, Miss Who, Mrs. Whatsit, Calvin and Mrs. Which
11. Kind of story (Use check mark)

____ Adventure	____ History	____ Biography
____ Fairytale	____ Folk Tale	____ Poetry
____ Georgraphy-travel	____ Nature Story	____ Mystery story
____ Play	____ Short Stories	Writer inserted
		X 'Sience fiction"

12. Your opinion of the book (Use check mark).

X One of the best books I ever read.

X A good book; I like it.

___ Not so very interesting.

___ I don't like it.

Writer: I like it because I like sience fiction stories.

Teacher's comment: "With women characters?"

Writer: In this story, Meg, Charles Wallance, and their friend are led on a search through the universe (~~in~~) (~~sear~~) for Meg's and Charles' father by a new-way of space travel called tessering "?".

Finally they do find Father but Charles Wallance has become a mind slave under the command of IT.

This book has been awarded the Newberry award.

Teacher's comments: "Where does one sentence end and the next begin."

"The Newberry must have given it to another book or else you didn't write a good report. I am completely lost. I can not understand on thing you wrote." ?

Teachers turn students off when they fail to see the point of view of the reader. What kinds of "book reports" do consider the reader's point of view?

Responses to a poem demonstrate that it is important for the teacher to consider each student. From individual taped interview, ---

Question: What did you think of this poem?

6-B: "It's a pretty nice poem. On the last sentence it says 'I meet the evening face to face' the evening has human characteristics. And the same thing on the last line on the top one, 'Steal the secret of the sun.'

6-B: "Well, I don't get the first part. If it's a rock how can he run across it?"

6-G:"First, when I think of this is my rock, I feel like that's the place that he comes to think, or rest or something and it must be a place where he can think out his thoughts without anybody disturbing him and he can stay there a long time and just think. And when I think of this is my rock, it's like a place for him that nobody knows about and it's in maybe a field or something with trees around. The reason I feel he stays there a long time is because 'Before the night has swept the sky' and 'I meet the evening face to face.' And also 'I steal the secret of the sun' because he's there in the daytime and he waits til evening so he can stay there awhile without anybody disturbing him. And he likes that place because he says 'This is my rock' that nobody else can take."

"I think maybe the way David McCord wrote it it sounds like really it was him. Not just somebody else. Maybe someplace he has a place to think because the way he wrote it makes it sound like it was him and not just somebody else because like some poets they write something and they try to make it sound like it's them but it doesn't sound like it's them at all."

4-B:"What did the other people say?--I was thinking of a frog sitting on a rock."

4-B:"Well, he's talking about something who goes there. Somebody is watching the sunset. 'And steal the secret of the sun'--hard to understand what this is really saying. Looks like he's just looking at it and he knows, you know, what it looks like and everything. 'Steal the secret of the sun.' I think it's a good poem because it has some meaning to it. It doesn't just say it right out loud, it just has you guess what it is. It doesn't just tell you. It's your opinion of what it means."

Studying these responses with college students of children's literature helped to build understand of the attitudes of different children toward the same poem.

When a student asks you for a piece of literature, he is assuming that you will recommend what is right for him. Teachers rank very low in children's estimation of the person who can help find good books. There is a lot to be done before teachers of children's literature can say that we put the point of view of the reader in highest priority when deciding what we teach and how we teach. Our discussions today can help with more questions and with answers.